

# Ideologues the Classroom

RUSSELL KIRK

One is not surprised at the phenomenon of radical students if one is acquainted with the intemperance and political fanaticism of some professors and instructors in colleges. Like the radical students, the radical professors are a minority; but again like the radical students, that professorial minority can exert an influence disproportionate to its numbers.

Some weeks ago I lunched with the liberal editor of one of the most influential daily newspapers in these United States. This distinguished editor was exasperated—to put it mildly—at the misrepresentation of affairs in Viet Nam by some people in the academy.

He had visited a Harvard class in history recently, the editor said, and had found the session devoted by the instructor to a demagogic assault on American policy in Southeast Asia—though the course had little or nothing to do with such concerns. Whenever the instructor uttered a particularly stinging witticism touching President Johnson or Secretary Dean Rusk, the students burst into cheers. They were a captive audience, but didn't mind.

When a great university is converted into a collective platform for advancing political dogmas—and confused dogmas at that—the editor remarked to me, with wonder that undergraduates lose all sense of order and all respect for the old duties and rights of the academy. The editor added that parents who hope for their sons and daughters to obtain a tolerable higher education must now think about sending them to small, traditional, liberal-arts colleges, perhaps in the Midwestern states. As I mentioned above, this gentleman is an influential liberal in politics—and a man of the Eastern seaboard.

Also, I conversed not long ago with a conservative gentleman active in California politics. His son, enrolled at a state college in California, had witnessed repeatedly such demagogic performances as the Harvard lecture described by my editor friend.

This California student studied under a professor of political science who was a regular apologist for Soviet foreign policy—and a bitter contemner of American motives. The student, somewhat skeptical about the Earthly Paradise in Eastern Europe described by this professor, on one occasion inquired in the classroom, "What about that Berlin Wall?"

"There is no Berlin Wall, Mr. A.," the professor replied blandly. "You have been victimized by Washington propaganda."

"But I've been in Berlin, and I've seen it," the student rejoined.

"How could you possibly have seen it?" the professor demanded, somewhat on edge. "You're too young."

"I was there last summer with my father, Professor."

The professor hesitated, scowling; then he rallied. "What you don't understand about the Berlin Wall, Mr. A., is this: of the East Germans who climbed over the wall last year, 75 per cent climbed back again. Next question?"

This student's father checked with the State Department. No figures exist as to how many fugitives from East Germany may have climbed back over the wall—though presumably the number is very small. Be that as it may, the professor had invented his statistic on the spur of the moment. Never confuse an ideologue with the facts.

Three years ago I published a book called *The Intemperate Professor*. In the title essay I discussed the apparent causes of ideological intemperance among academicians and gave instances of such attitudes. The book was favorably reviewed in the literary supplements, scholarly journals and bigger newspapers; almost no reviewer disputed my thesis that too many professors have fallen victim to fanatic politics—and inflict their private opinions upon their students. Yet there exists no sign that balance has been recovered in the academy since I wrote: indeed, matters have taken a turn for the worse.

I suppose that only painful personal experience can convince the professorial ideologue that something may be wrong with his ideological assumptions and his mode of converting the classroom into a center for indoctrination. In Eastern Europe, China, Cuba and other lands, professors formerly radical have learned what the practical triumph of totalitarian ideology means; and they have fled abroad, if lucky, or have disappeared, or now labor in a grinding intellectual servitude.

In America, such scholars and gentlemen may strut and shout with impunity

in their classrooms, as yet; Mao and Fidel are far distant, and so it is quite safe to sing the praises of these tyrants and to denounce Lyndon Johnson, say, as a merciless warmonger. But were the equivalent of Dr. Castro to sit in the White House, dissent from national policies would be terminated abruptly. The intemperate professor is sheltered by the very institutions he denounces.

Conceivably, however, the violent unrest of students—often stirred up, initially, by the ideologue-professors—may remind some of these academicians that ideas have consequences. When one of the consequences is total disruption of college classes—even the classes of ideologues—why, professors entertain second thoughts.

(Copyright 1968, General Features Corp.)

